

Northern Kentucky Views Presents:

The History of Perry Park

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Some eighteen winding miles from the mouth of the Kentucky River, 3 creeks fall from the Owen County (Kentucky) hills and join the river. The small town of Perry Park sits between southernmost Mill Creek and Big Twin Creek with Little Twin a bit farther north. The name "Perry Park" was given to the town in 1933 when publisher, John A. Perry, started the Perry Park Post Office in his store in the town then known as Ball's Landing. The Perry family had farmed the large tract of bottom land south of the town since the early 1800's. It is this land and the town that comprise the Perry Park of this history.

Geologists date the Kentucky River bed as at least thirty million years old. Preceding man's arrival were the pre-historic animals, and in the 1890's the huge bones of a mastodon or mammoth were found in the bank of Big Twin. Following the animals came the Indians hunting for food. South of the town of Perry Park many Indian relics have been found on "Indian Hill" revealing camp or burial sites of the many hunters who pursued the Buffalo along their trail that cuts into the side of the hill today.

When the white man arrived in America, Kentucky was a hunting ground controlled by New York's Iroquois who did not relinquish their claims until 1768 at Ft. Stanwix, where Virginia's western boundary became the Tennessee River. Fincastle County was the name in 1773 that the surveyor, James McAfee, knew Kentucky by. One of his party, Jacob Drennon, had heard Indian legends of healing spring waters and bribed a Delaware to take him up the Kentucky River to claim them. Thus, one of the first claims in Kentucky was made across the river from Perry Park's farm lands at Drennon Springs just up Drennon Creek. When McAfee followed Drennon up the Kentucky, his party camped at the mouth of Mill Creek where Perry Park is today. Possibly his party gave the site its first name, "Lick Skillet", from being so hungry that they licked their skillet clean.

The 1779 Land Law gave teeth to Virginia's claims, and with the end of the Revolution, George Rogers Clark drove the Indians out in 1782. Settlement began in earnest and in 1787 Gen. Jas. Wilkinson opened New Orleans as a market for Kentucky farmers' produce. The Louisiana Purchase of 1803 assured a market in New Orleans for Kentucky's tobacco. The land closest to the River was cleared and cultivated first. Perry Park's large homes attest to the success of its farming families.

About a mile upriver from "Lick Skillet" was Perry Landing, a small landing used by the Perry family to ship their hogsheads of tobacco. Still on the property is the old Perry home, "Wildwood," probably dating back to the early 1830's or before. The present mansion, "Glenwood Hall," was built by Washington Perry, grandfather of John, prior to the Civil War. It is an impressive house built on a lovely, natural rise. When G. Church Minor married Washington Perry's daughter, he became master of "Glenwood Hall" and his son, Perry Minor, lived there until John Perry bought the farm in 1932.

Some 2 miles farther south overlooking the Kentucky is the large brick house, "Inverness", built by Thomas A. Berryman and named for his wife's birthplace in Scotland. Mint Spring is located in front of the house and the farm landing was named Inverness Landing. At this landing was the Springport Ferry serving the guests of Drennon Springs, which as early as 1827 was competing with Graham's Springs in Harrodsburg as a spa for wealthy Kentuckians and southern planters. Fashionable Kentuckians visited New Orleans and the Meraire Course (as did Lexington in 1853) and returned with the latest fashions a la Sally Ward. Southern planters, in turn, came for the summer to Kentucky's springs in the era of the "Blue Wing" packets.

The biggest season at Drennon was in 1849 with 1000 guests. "Inverness" surely dates at least to then, because the Berrymans gave the house to their daughter, Ann Mary, and her husband, Dr. Daniel S. Adams, as a wedding present and their first child died in 1850. Long after the Civil War, "Inverness" was the scene of many week long parties of the Adamases, with Drennon's popularity persisting until the 1890's. The Adams family kept the house until John Perry acquired the title when he amassed all the Perry Park land in 1933.

To return to the town of Perry Park, a storeboat owner named James Ball visited the "Lick Skillet" landing to sell his wares to the settlers living up the Squiresville road. In 1826 he settled at the landing and after he had built a store the landing became known as "Ball's Landing" until John Perry's time. James Ball served as the wharfmaster for the landing, with his son, Cleveland Ball, following in his footsteps. For a period after Grover Cleveland's second term some residents called the town "Cleveland", but "Ball's Landing" persisted until 1933. A humorous coincidence of history is the fact that Cleveland's backers in his first campaign attacked his opponent, James G. Blaine, with the story of a wrong to a girl at Drennon Springs when Blaine was an instructor at The Western Military Institute.

In 1883 the present bridge across Mill Creek was built by Jack McAnally, which gave the bottom land farmers access to Ball's Landing. In 1899-1901 a lead mine was operated on Big Twin Creek which contributed to the growth of the town. The Star Hotel was well known to salesmen of the day. The hotel's colored cook, "Aunt" Rose Brown, who found a gold nugget in a turkey, also cooked at "Glenwood Hall" for Church Minor. General stores like the depicted J. S. Snodgrass store served the community, which boasted 17 homes at one time. The Methodist Church and the Old Mt. Zion church were the two religious landmarks. In 1942 John Perry repaired and re-dedicated Mt. Zion with Governor Willis attending the ceremony.

It would be a mistake to say that ante-bellum prosperity has always been the rule for Perry Park. It was a rough frontier, and there was considerable Confederate guerilla activity during the Civil War. After the War more than one shooting took place in the town, even in recent times.

Two people drowned in 1913 near Drennon Creek when the packet "Sonoma" sank. The railroads took over the Kentucky River's freight monopoly. The springs at Drennon and their way of life finally went out of existence in 1911. The automobile and good roads took the people who had needed the river for transportation away to the cities and modern life. The Depression added its woes and the 1937 flood left little reason for rebuilding with the people gone.

The land that had allowed Perry Park's farmers to build their fortunes and estates is still there. The new interests that will make Perry Park more accessible than ever before are about to write new chapters to Perry Park's history. Some of the charm of the Drennon Spring's era may be revived with modern facilities built that will attract people back to spend their leisure in this beautiful area.



An early Ball's Landing - Perry Park store.